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DENVER DAN TO THE RESCUE;

OR,

The Mountaineer's Stratagem.

By "NONAME."

Author of "Denver Dan and His Mystic Band," "Denver Dan and the Road Agents," "Denver Dan Outwitted," "Denver Dan and the Counterfeiters," "Denver Dan the Sheriff," "Denver Dan's Peril," Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE GUESTS AT THE "MINER'S DELIGHT."

ON the Pike's Peak road, at the time of our story, and about twenty-five miles from that famous spot where more fortunes have been made and lost than one can very well count, there stood a rude two-story frame dwelling known as the "Miner's Delight" tavern.

Here all the trains of emigrants, gold-hunters and horse-traders stopped to refresh man and beast, Van Nodine, the proprietor, reaping a goodly harvest by supplying their wants.

The man's full name was Van Buren Tippecanoe Nodine, but this had been shortened down to Van, which suited him to a dot.

The days of the Pike's Peak excitement had passed by long before, and the trail had become a road, but Van still remained, a flourishing town having grown around him in the meantime.

There were many lawless characters in the neighborhood, stage robberies being frequent, and many a belated traveler preferred stopping at the "Miner's Delight," the old name being still retained, to traveling through the mountain passes at night.

The place itself was not possessed of the best possible reputation, and many robberies had taken place there, but it was preferable to the mountains upon a dark or stormy night, and at such times was generally well filled.

Early one evening three travelers were seated in a private room of the hostelry, discussing a hot supper which had been brought into them by the enterprising landlord.

Two of these persons were young men, aged twenty and eighteen years, respectively, and were named Martin and Barstow, the third being a man between thirty and thirty-five.

This latter person was the hero of our story, Daniel Fleming, sheriff at Denver, Colorado, known everywhere as Denver Dan.*

The three were returning to Denver from Santa Fe,

where Dan had gone in quest of a noted highwayman called Nixon, but known by a dozen *aliases*.

Hal Barstow, in escaping from a man in a cave situated in a lonely part of the mountains, had caused his death, thus cheating the gallows. But everyone was glad the villain had perished, and therefore it did not make much difference how he perished.

The young man called Martin had been rescued from the gang of robbers, of whom Nixon was the chief, and had promised to lead a better life, a promise, which we may say in passing, was most religiously kept.

"It seems odd, doesn't it?" remarked Hal, after a pause in which all three had been taking off the sharp edge of their appetites, "for us to be sitting here quietly with no one to disturb us, no bullets expected to be whizzing about our heads, nor anything to bother us in the slightest!"

"So it does," answered Dan. "We got so used to it down there, that it don't seem hardly natural to be without anything exciting to stir us up. Why, we haven't had any adventures to speak of for a week."

There were plenty in store for them, however, and before long they would have no cause to complain of any lack of excitement.

At that moment the door was thrown open and a tall, robust, heavily bearded man, dressed in rough clothes and having the general look of a mountaineer about him, entered and stared around.

The room was a private one, and Dan had given the landlord special orders to let no one enter it, and he was therefore surprised at this sudden intrusion.

Thinking that the man had doubtless made a mistake, and seeing that the room was private would soon retire, he said nothing, but went on with his meal.

"H'am, 'pear to be enjoyin' yersel's don't ye?" muttered the man. "Can't ye raise another chair somewheres? 'F ye've got a stool it 'll do jist as well."

Hal looked at the man in astonishment, and concluded that he was either a fool or a man who was bound to do as he chose, notwithstanding that good manners stood in the way.

*Read the foregoing volumes of this series for the former adventures of this wonderful man. Each number is complete and of absorbing interest.

"Feel kind o' hungry myself," continued the stranger, "an' seein' ye pitch in gives me an appetite, whar'm I gwine to sit?"

"The landlord will give you your supper outside, if you speak to him," said Dan quietly.

"I don't want it outside, I want it yere, whar it's cozy. Sides that I likes comp'ny, an' vittles al'ays tastes better when yer got some one with you."

"This is a private room," said Hal, "you must go elsewhere."

The stranger opened his fishy eyes in astonishment, and then opened his mouth as if both were connected and could not work separately.

"Whar' the bloomin' hot place is that?" he asked. "Any hows, I ain't gwine thar, and that settles it."

"You can't stay here, my man," said Dan coolly; "we've paid for the use of this room and do not want to be disturbed."

"Who the dooce wants ter disturb yer? I on'y wants suthin' t' eat!"

"Go and ask the landlord, I tell you. He'll give you what you want."

"He be durned! I don't take no stock in him. You fellows has got chicken and roast beef and plum puddin', and coffee, and them things is jest what I likes."

"Van will give you all you want, so clear out, for heaven's sake," said Dan, getting up.

The man was fast becoming a nuisance, and Dan thought it was about time to get rid of him.

"I tell yer I ain't goin' to ther landlord. Everything I want is here, and that's enough. Lend me yer cheer till I chaw a bit."

"I want you to get out of here, right away," said Dan, furiously.

"Ye does."

"Yes."

"I ain't goin'."

"If you don't I'll put you out."

"Who will, you?"

"Yes, I."

"I'd like ter see ye."

"Wait two minutes and you will."

"Look yere, young feller, my name's Tige Somers, an' I live in the mount'ns. My teeth is filed and I kin bite. If yer go fur ter tech me I'll make a 'remains' fur the coroner ter set on out'n yer in about two——"

"Time's up!" said Dan, and catching Tige Somers by the collar with his right hand, he whirled him about with great dexterity, and seizing the nether part of the man's trousers with his left, gave him what is termed in mountain parlance, "the grand bounce."

Mr. Tige Somers shot through that door like a cannon ball, and when he brought up, it was against the further wall of the outer room.

Then the door was closed, and Dan sat down to finish his supper as if nothing had happened, while Hal laughed till he thought he would choke.

"I fancy Mr. Tige Somers was somewhat surprised by his sudden exit," he said, at length.

"I am afraid he will give us trouble," added Martin. "He looks to be that kind of a man, half fool and half bully, into whom it is impossible to knock any sense."

"I'll guarantee to give him all the sense he wants," answered Dan, with a quiet laugh. "I've seen specimens of this kind before."

Meanwhile the big stranger had straightened himself out, and advancing towards Van, who was enjoying the fun all to himself, blurted out:

"Who's that yer stranger in thar? What d'ye call him when yer wants him ter come ter grub?"

"He goes by the name of Denver Dan!"

"Whoop! ye don't say! Gosh! nobody else 'd dare to chuck me out the way he did, an' I like his spunk, but chew me up, if I don't get even with him!"

CHAPTER II.

DAN BEFRIENDS A WAIF, AND HAL ASKS QUESTIONS.

WHEN our hero had finished his supper and chatted an hour or so with his companions, they all went into the principal lounging-room of the inn, where were gathered a number of miners, mountain men, and stragglers.

Over in an obscure corner sat a boy of about fourteen, bright-looking, but ragged and not over clean, fast asleep.

Van presently discovered him, and said he would play a joke upon the lad, to teach him not to come lounging about his place in that way.

"He's nobody's brat, anyhow, and ain't no good," said the landlord, whereupon he proceeded to carry out his trick.

Taking a pair of tongs in his hand, he extracted a live coal from the red-hot stove in the center of the room, for the night was cold and stormy, and a fire was very grateful.

Then advancing to the lad, he held the coal close under his nose, having a pinch of red pepper in his other hand, which he meant to sprinkle upon the coal at the right moment.

The heat of the coal would cause the boy to wake, and then Van would throw the red pepper on it, causing the boy to sneeze and cough, and most likely burn his nose in starting suddenly forward.

He had proceeded as far as holding the fire under the lad's nose, the crowd of idlers looking with breathless interest, and making ready to indulge in loud guffaws at the poor boy's expense, when the coal snapped in two and fell upon the boy's clothes.

He jumped to his feet and started to run out, in which event his rags, already smoking, would have burst into flames, and, in all likelihood, have burned him to death.

Dan sprang toward him in a moment, and clasping him tightly in his arms, extinguished the fire, the coal falling to the floor.

The poor lad, only half awake, began to cry, rubbing his leg, which had been burned, and thinking that Dan meant to hurt him, begging to be released.

"For shame, Van Nodine," said Dan, releasing the lad, and bidding him not to be alarmed; "you ought to have more sense."

"What's that to you?" snapped the man.

"Everything! Suppose the boy had run outside in the wind and been burned. You would have been responsible for his death."

"Small loss, anyhow. He ain't good for nothin', allus beggin' for something t' eat, an' never doin' nothin' t' pay fur it."

"Tain't so!" said the boy, sturdily. "He made me work all day in the stable around the hosses, an' one on 'em stepped on my foot; said he'd gimme some supper for it. He lied, fur he didn't gimme nothin'; said it was too late for supper, an' I'd have to wait fur breakfas'. Then in the mornin' said I didn't git up early enough. He's no good, he is; that's what's the matter o' him."

"Git out, ye young whelp!" said Van, with an oath, striding up to the lad and raising his fist. "Don't ye tell no lies on me, or I'll take it out o' yer hide!"

"Tain't lies, it's the truth, an' they ain't no meaner man in the hull country than you is. Yer mean enough to ax yer shadder ter lend ye two bits fur follerin' ye 'round!"

There was a loud laugh at this quaint description of meanness, and Van, incensed, brought down his fist.

It struck upon Denver Dan's arm, however, and the latter, putting the lad behind him, said, sternly:

"Van Nodine, if you offer to touch that youngster I'll knock you down. Understand?"

The bullying landlord, having heard of Dan's prowess, and not caring to put it to the test, slunk away abashed.

"What's your name, my boy?" asked Dan, kindly.

"I donno."

"Don't know your own name. Pshaw! don't be frightened, think a bit, my man."

"Well, some calls me 'bub,' and some calls me 'sonny.' He"—pointing to Van—"calls me a 'young skunk.' Old Dave Briggs used ter call me 'Tom,' but I don't think that's right, nuther, for I recollects a nice man, when I was a little shaver and didn't live here, what used ter call me suthin' else."

"Do you remember what it was?" asked Hal, kindly, looking the lad in the face.

The boy started, returned the glance, and then said excitedly:

"I knowed yer onet, didn't I? What's yer name?"

"Hal. Did you ever hear it?"

"Pears to me I did," said the lad, contracting his brows and evidently trying to think. "Hal," he repeated, slowly, "Hal—there was somethin' else to it, Hal Bar—— Oh, I've got it, Bear's Toe! Funny name, isn't it?"

Hal laughed and caught the boy's hand in his.

"Not Bear's Toe, my boy, but Barstow; you've hit it pretty nearly."

"Well, I said B'ar's Toe, didn't I? On'y I don't say B'ar, but Bear, that's the right way ter say it."

"Do you know this lad, Hal?" asked Dan, becoming interested.

"I think so. Let me see, my boy," he continued, sitting down and drawing the lad toward him, the loungers now expressing considerable interest in the affair, "you said that a nice gentleman used to call you something else when you were small?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it—Jimmy?" pausing a little before he uttered the name.

"No, it wasn't that, sir," said the youth, without hesitation.

"Was it—Charlie?"

The boy seemed to think a little, turning the word over in his mouth, and then answered in the negative.

"Was it—George?"

"No;" this time instantly.

"Was it Harry?" this question being put carelessly.

"That's it, that's it!" cried the boy, suddenly. "Harry, Harry, that's the right one. How'd ye come to guess it?" and he laughed gleefully.

"Who is old Dave Briggs the boy talks about?" asked Hal, turning to the crowd.

"On'y an old cuss what come here a year ago from the east," answered one of the men. "He said the boy war his'n, but we allus 'lowed he lied."

"Where is he now?" asked Dan.

"You got me there, stranger, fur I couldn't say."

"He's gone away, then?"

"Yaas, went away in a box! Maybe he's in heaven, but dasen't say whether he is or not."

"He's dead, then?"

"Now yer got it, solid. He war planted three months ago, an' since then the kid has lived around promis'c'us. He ain't no good!"

"Ye're another!" retorted the lad, spunkily. "Who stole Widder Haney's chickens last spring, an' who traded an old blind nag off on Sam Hedges fur a good one? Ya! I've got ye down fine, Hank Miles, an' don't ye forgit it!"

"Sh, my lad, that won't do," said Hal, gravely, while the idlers enjoyed the laugh at the man's expense. "That's what gets you into trouble; you shouldn't tell all you know."

"I don't, fur if I did some o' those roosters'd git yanked up quicker 'n scat, ye kin jist bet."

"Never mind that now, my boy," said Hal, repressing a smile; "you must be hungry."

"Ye're a shoutin'! I feel as if I could eat a mule with the harness on."

"You musn't use so much slang," answered Hal, with comical emphasis. "Come in here and have a bite, there's lots to eat yet;" and he led the lad into the private room, followed by Martin and Dan, the latter observing, as he closed the door:

"I am strangely interested in the lad, and hope that we may unravel the mystery concerning him."

CHAPTER III.

THE WAIF IS RECOGNIZED AND GIVES A WARNING.

"Now before we do anything else, Harry," said Hal, the boy's eyes sparkling at the sound of the old familiar name, "you must have your face washed. We can't think of letting you eat before that is done."

"Somebody used to say that, long ago," said the lad thoughtfully, "an' I used ter kick an' holler an' then she'd say, 'Why, why, Harry you must be good.' I wonder who it was?"

"God bless the lad," murmured Dan. "It's all coming back to him. He has been well bred, formerly, I can see that!"

The operation of washing having been performed, Hal

not stopping at the face and hands, but making a clean job of it, Martin having brought in plenty of water, soap and towels, the work of refreshing the inner man, or boy rather, was proceeded with.

The poor waif had not at all belied the condition of his appetite, and ate as much as a man, until Hal had finally to stop him, for fear that he would hurt himself.

"Do you know him, Hal, now that he's been washed and fed?" inquired Dan.

"Yes; he is the son of an old friend of my father's. He was stolen when a child of, say six years old."

"What is his name?"

"Harry Everett. He was his father's only son, and the poor man went nearly crazy over his loss. His mother, poor thing, being in delicate health, died from the shock."

"Ask him if he remembers how he came out here, so far from home."

"Harry, boy," said Hal, kindly, "you haven't always lived out here, have you, among these rough men?"

"No; seems to me I remember a place where the houses was all close together, in great long lines, and the roads was all straight an' turned sharp corners to each other, and the houses wasn't made of wood, but some red stuff, and some of 'em was white, and gray and yellor."

"He remembers the city," murmured Dan.

"It was a funny place, and I used to run away and get lost, 'cause I couldn't see my own house, they was so many just like it, ye know. I don't get lost out here, 'cause I can see the houses a long ways off. They didn't have no trees there, only in straight rows, with boxes around 'em, 'cept in a place I used to go sometimes with the woman that used to wash my face."

"His nurse," said Hal. "I remember her. When I was a boy, she used to tease me, when I went to visit Harry, and call me Hal Bear's Toe; it was that which decided me, though I remembered the poor lad's face."

"And haven't I got no father nor mother nor nothin'?" inquired the lad. "Other boys has 'em, where's mine? didn't I have any? Old Dave said I hadn't."

"Yes my lad, you did have once, but I don't know now whether you have or not."

"Won't you find out?"

"Indeed I will."

"What became of his father?" asked Dan.

"He went off in search of his boy and I have never seen him since. When I went home, after sister Hattie was married, you remember, I heard that he had utterly disappeared."

"Then we may have trouble in restoring the poor lad. At any rate, we will take him back to Denver with us. He will not be the first poor waif I have protected."

"Indeed, he will not, for your kind-heartedness is as well known as your courage and daring."

"That will do, Hal," answered Dan with a smile; "I am fortunate in having such good fellows by my side as you and your cousin Jack, Mike, Joe Darrell and the rest."

"How would you like to go to Denver with me and this gentleman, Harry," asked Hal of the lad, he having been all attention while they were talking.

"First-rate. Is my father there?"

"I believe not, but I can look when I get there."

"And you will find him, won't you, and tell him I've been awful lonesome since he went away?"

"Indeed I will."

"Then I'll go. Say," he added with sudden earnestness, "is this man, him what put the fire out, is he Denver Dan?"

"Yes; you have heard of him?"

"You just bet I have; old Dave onct knowed a man named Larry the Wolf, an' he used to cuss like sin at Denver Dan, an' say he'd kill him if he got a chance."

"He has had a chance, more than once," remarked Dan with a laugh, "but he hasn't done it yet. May be Larry would know something about the boy's father, Hal."

"I doubt it."

"Well, if he is Denver Dan he wants to look out for himself," added the boy earnestly.

"Why so?"

"Cause. Tige Somers an' another feller, and Hank Miles was talkin'—oh, go to the door," he said suddenly breaking off. "Easy, now, an' you'll catch them fellers a listenin'," he whispered. "I heard their boots creak."

Hal got up from his seat suddenly and darting to the door threw it open.

As it swung inwards the effect of suddenly opening it was to cause two men to fall flat on the floor in a confused heap.

"So—ho, you've been listening have you?" cried Hal. "Get up!" he said sternly, "before I kick you out!"

He did not wait, however, but beat a vigorous tattoo upon the men's shins and trouser seats, expediting their movements considerably.

"No man kicks me an' lives to tell of it," said Tige Somers, who was one of the men, the other being unknown. We was on'y jest leanin' agin' the door when you had to go and chuck it open, cuss yer. Ye ain't got no manners anyhow."

"I have more than you want to handle, so clear out!" and once more the doughty Tige got the bounce.

The unknown did not wait for this ceremony to be performed upon him, but made himself scarce most expeditiously, fading away, as it were, like a beautiful vision.

"It's getting late," said Dan; "suppose we go to bed. You'll take the boy in with you, will you, Hal?"

"Yes. Here, Mr. Landlord, give us a light, and call us at six in the morning."

Dan had previously engaged a double-bedded room over night, and the three intended to depart as early as possible the next day.

Van had tried to put them all in separate rooms, but they objected to this and said they would all go into the same room or not in any, and he had been compelled to accede to their wishes, much to his disgust.

He had made certain plans, and this arrangement would tend to upset them entirely.

What these plans were will presently be revealed.

"You ain't going to take that dirty boy to bed with you in my clean rooms, are you?" he growled. "Let him sleep in the stable, that's good enough for him."

"Allow me to differ with you. He is not dirty and the stable is not good enough. There's the pay for his keep, so shut up!"

Hal threw the man a couple of silver dollars, and taking the light, which a hired man had brought in, lifted Harry up as though he had been a baby, and left the room, followed by Dan and Martin.

When the door above was heard to close, Van whispered to Tige:

"Ye'll have to git more boys, Tige, for them three'll fight like Sam Hill. They've got lot's o' dust that they wants ter leave behind, an' their lives, too, if they cut up any pranks."

When they were all in the room above, Harry took Dan's hand and whispered softly:

"You don't think I'm a-lyin', do yer, Mr. Denver Dan?"

"No, I do not. What have you got to say to me?"

"When I was half asleep down yonder, afore that cuss dropped the fire onter me, I heard 'em a-chinnin' together, Van and Tige and one or two more, that they was goin' ter clean out Denver Dan ter night, and not leave him enough ter say his prayers with. That's what I was goin' to tell yer down stairs."

"Thanks, Harry, lad, but I shall have something to say on that question myself. Now turn in and go to sleep, and don't git frightened, though I know you're not one of the kind to scare easy."

CHAPTER IV.

TIGE SOMERS GETS THE "BOUNCE" AGAIN.

ABOUT two hours after this, Dan was suddenly awakened by feeling a hand upon his face and hearing the boy Harry whisper:

"They're coming!"

Dan arose softly, and listening attentively, heard the villains mounting to the window.

Hal and Martin were awake, but they remained perfectly quiet, revolvers in hand, ready to pop the first man that appeared.

"Get under the bed," said Dan to the boy, "and leave everything to us. Let them come in if they want to. They'll be eager enough to get out I fancy."

"Ye'll give 'em fits?"

"Yes," was the reply, with a smile.

"All right, then, I'll lay low, but if you want me, just holler. You won't forget."

The window blinds were opened carefully, the sash raised without any noise, and a man stepped with noiseless feet into the room, followed by a second, both armed to the teeth.

The first man crept swiftly and silently to the door, and whispered a word or two to some one evidently outside, being answered upon the instant.

He then began fumbling at the lock, his companion approaching cautiously to the bed where Dan still lay, apparently asleep, Martin by his side and the boy underneath.

Suddenly there was a tiny flash and a sharp report, proceeding from under the bed, and the man at the door gave a howl and clapped his hands to his leg.

The other man made a rush for Dan, but was met by a shower of bullets, which, though they did not kill, caused him several severe pains.

Every man was upon his feet in a moment, and the two intruders attempted to escape.

Hal grasped the man nearest the bed by the throat, and dragging him down to the window let in the light upon him, revealing the features of the unknown.

"Get out of here, right away!" he said, and then, with the assistance of Martin, they threw the wretch out of the window, caring little whether he broke his neck or not.

As it happened, he landed in the middle of a knot of his friends, and scattered them most promiscuously, giving them several bloody noses and bruised heads.

Dan had meantime collared the other man, who proved to be the veritable Tige Somers, a little the worse for Harry's bullet, for it was the plucky little waif that had inaugurated the scrimmage, but nevertheless in good condition.

"You here again?" said Dan, sternly. "Now, see here, you confounded idiot, for you haven't sense enough to be a knave, if you don't clear right out of this town, and never show your face again, you'll be a dead man in five minutes."

"I kin lick a hull pack o' wolves, an' that's why they call me Tige. When I gits mad they calls in the coroner. I'm wuss nor blue——"

Hal, having disposed of the other ruffian, now came forward and swung open the door, firing half a dozen shots in the dark.

Dan then suddenly interrupted the flow of Tige's eloquence and bestowed upon him a kick sufficient to knock all his front teeth out, had they been false, sending him howling along that hallway and down those narrow stairs as if he had been shot from a cannon.

"That makes another bounce fur Tige!" yelled Harry, capering about with delight. "Guess he'll git used to it bum-bye."

Those outside had fled at the first alarm, and Hal's shots had only struck the empty air; but the rascals were sufficiently warned by the reception given their two comrades not to molest Dan and his friend further, and they were left alone for the rest of the night.

"What made you fire that shot, Harry?" asked Dan, when everything was quiet once more. "We would have had the whole gang here in a few minutes, and then you could have helped us clean them out."

"Well, you see, I got excited, and having a pop belonging ter Hal, just let it go off wi'out thinking. Didn't I take old Tige in the leg bully? Gosh! he jumped about wuss'n a man wi' a yaller-jacket hornet in the seat o' his breeches."

"There, there, Harry, boy, go to bed," said Hal, with a laugh. "We must really improve your manner of speaking; it's really quite shocking."

"What's the matter of it? I don't swear an' cuss like Van Nodine's boys, an' such as them; I only say 'Gosh,' an' they says——"

"Never mind what," interrupted Hal, laughing again. "I am going to make a new boy of you, Harry, for your father's sake, and if I don't find him I'll be your father myself."

"You will? Won't that be jolly! Gosh! You're a —— Don't you want me to say that?" he broke off, suddenly, seeing Hal's look.

"I'd rather you wouldn't. Boys don't need to use such words, as there are plenty of good ones."

"If you don't like it, that settles it, and I'll do my best to be a good boy what you'll like to have around, but you won't ax too much of me at first, will yer?"

"No, I'll bring you along easy, poor little waif!" the latter said to himself. "Now turn in and go to sleep. Dan and Martin have been there long ago."

"Poor John Everett!" he murmured to himself, long after the lad had folded his arms and was sleeping soundly by his side; "he was my father's friend, indeed, and shall I neglect this lad, or be impatient with him? Not I; there are the makings of a man in him, and we will bring them out, in spite of the hard knocks he has had, and his bad lack of training and education."

The next morning our party was up betimes, and Hal took Harry out to a store where a general supply of goods was kept, and put him inside of a passably good suit of clothes.

After breakfast Dan went into the office and bar-room of the "Miners' Delight," and threw Van a handful of silver.

"Do you charge extra when attempts are made upon the lives of your guests?" he demanded, "or is that included in the bill?"

"Perhaps ye think I had suthin' to do with the trouble last night."

"I know you did, though I didn't have the pleasure of seeing and putting a bullet in you."

"The man what talks like that hez got to git licked or lick me, one or t' other!" bragged Van, coming out from behind the bar.

"Do you want to be licked?" said Dan.

"Ya-as, if ye think ye kin do it."

Dan laid his rifle and arms upon a table, put his hat and coat on top of them, and turning back his shirt-cuffs put himself on guard.

"Ready?" he then asked.

"Yaas, but ye needn't hev put yerself to such a trouble, fur ye'll hev to pick up all them duds when I get through with yer."

"Are you ready?" again demanded Dan.

"Yaas."

"Then look out!" and the caution was needed, for he walked right into Van in a manner that would have delighted the best pugilist that ever lived.

He didn't give Van a chance to strike a single blow, but peppered him most unmercifully, closing both eyes, swelling his nose to an abnormal size, knocking out two front teeth, and otherwise demoralizing the treacherous scoundrel who would have had him murdered in his bed at the dead of night.

A crowd had collected by this time, and, as is the way with all crowds, cheered lustily for the winning man; but Dan, seeing that Van had got enough for the present, allowed him to sneak away, and then, resuming his coat and hat, picked up his traps and sauntered out, followed by his companions.

"That's only half the scoundrel deserves," said he, "but it will do for now. If anybody else wants to tackle Denver Dan, let him step out."

There were no takers, and the three mounted their horses

and rode away, Hal placing Harry upon the saddle in front of him.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOUNTAINEER'S STRATAGEM.

TIGE SOMERS was a man who never knew when he had enough, and was never satisfied unless he was making trouble for some one.

Ignorant to a degree, uncultivated, uncivilized you might almost have said, boorish, brutal and bullying, it was impossible to convince him that he was a nuisance, and a hint was utterly lost upon him, even when accompanied by a kick.

This man was now plotting to take revenge upon Dan for the summary treatment he had received at the latter's hands, but not daring to act openly he had resolved upon a stratagem to carry out his purpose.

While he was deliberating how to act chance threw the means into his way, and by an accident he was enabled, for a time at least, to get the noted vigilante into his power.

He was riding along at a slow pace on the morning that Dan and his friends had taken their departure for Denver when he suddenly came upon a man mounted like himself, but seemingly engrossed in thought.

"Hello, stranger!" he shouted, "going my way? If ye are I'll go with yer."

"Do you belong in these parts?" answered the other.

"Wall, yaas, can't say but what I do."

"Perhaps you can give me some information."

"No; can't give anything, 'tain't my way o' doin' bizness."

"I would pay you well, if you could tell me what I desire to know."

"Now ye're shoutin'. I ain't much on the give, but I kin sell ye a'most anythin'."

"I am looking for a boy stolen from the east, some time ago, who, from information I have received, I judge to be in this neighborhood."

Tige saw a chance for a speculation and an opportunity to get even with Dan at the same time, and resolved to learn more.

"What sort of a boy was he, stranger, good-lookin' or not?"

"He was good-looking as a child, but may have changed."

"Would be about fo'teen year old now, I take it; small and wiry, quick-witted an' sharp-spoken like, eh?"

"Exactly; do you know any such, reported to be without parents or perhaps stolen, in these regions?"

"Wall, I jest do, stranger, an' no mistake. Old Dave Briggs had a——"

"That's the man, the very one I was told had a homeless boy in his care," interrupted the man, excitedly.

"Where is he now?"

"Gone to glory or t'other place, I dunno which."

"Dead?"

"You've got it right down to a dot! Deader 'n a coyote wi' a bullet through his noddle."

"But the lad, do you know where he is?"

"His real name was Harry, wasn't it?"

"Yes, yes, that's it—Harry Everett. Where is he now?"

"Ain't it about time for the fust payment, Mister—Mister What-you-call-'em?" asked Tige, insinuatingly.

"Ah, I had forgotten; to be sure it is," and the stranger gave the mountaineer two or three gold pieces.

"I can't tell ye where he is now, adzackly, stranger, but I kin tell ye whar he wur on'y last night."

"Where?"

"At Van Nodine's tavern, the 'Miner's Delight,' about six or may be seven miles from here."

"Show me the way and I will go there at once."

"'Twon't be no use, Mr.—I don't know your name, I don't think."

"Simonson."

"You ben't the boy's father, then, fur ye said his name wus Everett."

"No, no; I'm looking for the lad in his father's interest, that's all."

"He ain't thar now, Mister Simonson, he's gone away with a low feller, what told him he wur goin' to find his dad, but I'll tell ye suthin'."

"Well, what is it?"

"The cuss ain't goin' to take him to his pop at all. He's a mis'ble sneak, an' he's goin' to take ther kid off inter the mount'ns, an' make a young thief outer him, an' ef he won't have it, why, ther cuss'll jest hang that ere boy up by the heels and riddle him wi' bullets."

"The monster! Heaven help my poor boy and save him from such a fate! Where is the villain, and what is his name?"

"Ye've hearn tell o' Denver Dan, ain't ye?"

"The renowned vigilante? Yes, many a time. He is noted not only for his daring and the swift vengeance which he deals out to lawless men, but also for his kind heart."

"Wull, stranger, the man what has ther boy pretends he is Denver Dan hisself, but he ain't nothin' but a low, sneak-in' cuss, what's tryin' ter make a livin' outer Dan's reper-tashin, that's what he is."

"How is he called?"

"His right name's Dan Perkins, an' he's been hunted from place to place like a skunk. Him, an' two other chaps jest like him, got hold on the boy last night, an' gin him suthin' t' eat, an' persuaded him they was takin' him hum, an' now the poor little cuss swars by 'em."

"God help them if I come up with them, for I will not. Lead me to where they are and you shall have a hundred dollars."

"Stranger, shake! Yer jest the man fur my money. I'd do ther job fur ye, fer ther love o' ther thing, but as ye've been so kind ez to mention money, I'm not ther man ter deprive ye o' the sassafracshun o' doin' a generous ax, not me."

"Lead on, I will follow."

"All right. I know the road the 'tarnal wolves has taken, but we can't catch em before night. I've got a dodge what'll git him inter our hands, an' ye jest want ter leave it all ter me."

"I will rely upon your sagacity."

* * * * *

That night Dan and his companions stopped at the house

of a miner who occasionally accommodated travelers, and they were well provided for, the man's daughter, a good-looking girl of twenty, being particularly attentive to Harry, to whom she had taken a great fancy.

Tige had given his companion an idea of his plot, and the latter had promised to do his part of it.

An hour or so after Dan had retired, he rode up and calling the miner, who was sitting with his wife and daughter by the kitchen fire, expressed his desire to remain all night.

"Ain't got room," said the man. "Denver Dan, two men and a boy have got all the rooms there is to spare."

"The man is not Denver Dan, but an imposter, and has stolen my boy. Get him out of the house on some pretext, and I will take the lad away."

"D'ye mean to say he's an old fraud?"

"Yes, he and his companions. They stole the lad from me last night. I cannot fight them alone, but if you get them away, I will run in and take the boy, who will know me, and before they get back I shall be far away."

"What am I goin' to do?"

"Let your daughter hide, and then do you tell them she has been carried off by road-agents. They will go to her rescue, and then I will get the boy. Tell them Tige Somers has done it."

"Tige Somers! I'll let daylight inter him if I catch him. Hide in the barn, Susie, an' I'll do what the stranger says."

Soon after that there was a dreadful commotion in the house, and Dan, Hal and Martin rushed out, led by the miner, Dan shouting:

"After the villains! Denver Dan to the rescue!"

CHAPTER VI.

DAN AND HAL IN A FIX.

AFTER Dan was well out of the house and there was no chance of his returning for an hour at least, Simonson, as he had called himself, hurried up to the room said to have been occupied by Dan.

He ran hastily in, expecting to see the boy lying in bed asleep, but though he saw his clothes on a chair, saw nothing of the lad himself.

He found the place in the bed where the boy had lain, but the boy was missing.

With a sudden apprehension that all was not right, he started to go down again, when he heard a scream from the direction of the barn in Susie's voice.

She appeared to be struggling with some one, and as Simonson reached the lower floor he heard her mother say:

"That fellow, Tige Somers, has lugged the boy off, and they are trying to take Sue, too. Help!"

A suspicion of the true state of the case at once darted across the man's mind.

Tige had succeeded in getting Dan out of the house that he might capture the lad himself.

Simonson ran towards the barn, cocking his rifle as he went, but Tige had just left, carrying the struggling boy dressed only in his night clothes, and at the same time a party of men were seen hurrying off with Susie.

The man started off in pursuit, but the villains soon distanced him, as they were mounted and he had left his horse behind.

When he returned for it, he found that some one, in his absence, had run the animal off, and thus he was left alone, deprived of his boy, on foot and under suspicion of having been in the plot as deeply as Tige.

He therefore concluded that it would not be safe to remain in the vicinity of the house any longer, and started off down the road as fast as he could run.

Meanwhile the miner had led Dan and the rest a circuitous journey, and started to return to the house, where he expected to find his daughter, safe and sound.

Tige had been beforehand with Simonson and had stolen the sleeping child, such being his design all along.

More than that, he had communicated with a gang of scoundrels, like himself, during the day, and had attempted to get the miner's daughter and Dan both into their hands.

While one party carried away the girl, Tige having gagged Harry and bound him upon the saddle in front of him, the other lay in wait for Dan when he should return.

The miner was in advance, when suddenly a party of men sprang up all around them and let fly with revolvers and muskets.

The miner's horse dashed off and enabled the fellow to escape; Hal was thrown into the bushes, while his animal, badly frightened, stampeded, leaving his rider alone.

Dan was wounded, and in an instant was surrounded, pulled from his horse and securely bound.

Martin got away with a few scratches, but Hal was found and carried off together with Dan, tightly bound and fastened upon one of the villains' horses.

When the miner reached his house he discovered that he had been imposed upon, that his daughter was missing, and that Tige Somers, his inveterate enemy, was at the bottom of the whole trouble.

He swore to be revenged upon the rascal; but as it was now late, and no friend lived within five miles, he was obliged to wait until morning.

* * * * *

Around a fire in a lonely part of the mountain sat a score of outlaws and mountain men, Tige among them; and apart from the rest, secured to the rocks, Hal and Dan.

"I said I'd get even with you, Dan, and so I will. No man kicks me, I tell ye, and lives to brag on it."

As yet, Dan of course did not know that the boy was in Tige's keeping, the outlaw having concealed him, and both he and Hal thought that the mountaineer's stratagem had been directed simply against them, and that Harry was still safe.

It gave Dan no alarm whatever to be in the hands of his enemies, for he had escaped so many times when all hope seemed gone that he did not give up the idea of getting away again.

"It will be more than a kick the next time, you contemptible skunk," replied Dan, "and you can think yourself lucky if you get out of this affair alive."

"H'm, don't ye be too sure about that. We fellers is gwine ter hang ye in the mornin'."

"I've been there before, so you can't frighten me that way. Why, there's nothing I like better than a good hanging, there's lots of fun about it."

"Ye won't find any about this yere, let me tell ye, so ye might's well say what prayers ye knows, fur at sunrise——"

"Oh, clear out and go to sleep," said Hal, "and when you get up, put a torpedo in the seat of your breeches, so I can give you a good send off!"

The others laughed at this, and Tige, enraged, left the two prisoners alone, thinking that there was no use in trying to intimidate them.

The night passed away in silence, nothing occurring to disturb the watchers, or give the prisoners any hope that they would be rescued.

Dan was of a hopeful nature, and even in the midst of his worst dangers, had never given way to despair, and he felt, even now, that he would escape.

At day-break he and Hal were led out, ropes put about their necks and thrown over the limbs of trees, Tige standing ready to give the signal.

CHAPTER VII.

DAN'S NARROW ESCAPE—IN PURSUIT OF THE OUTLAWS—BOMBARDED.

"Now boys, haul away lively when I gives the word!" said Tige. "We'll show these yere fellers that they ain't no hope fur 'em this time, not a bit."

The men took hold of the ends of the two ropes and made ready to haul away, the intended victims having been bound hand and foot.

"Now!" yelled Tige.

The villains laid hold with a will, and swung the doomed men clear of the ground.

Crack!

Crack!

Two pistol shots sound sharply out upon the still morning air.

Thud!

Thud!

Two heavy bodies fall to the ground, accompanied by two cries of mortal agony.

Crack!

Snap!

Bang!

"Now boys, give 'em fits! Lay in to 'em! Don't let one on 'em get away! Shoot Tige fust!"

This is shouted in a boy's voice, and Harry Everett dashes into the midst of them, armed with two revolvers, which he discharges right and left.

The men whom he has not already picked off, make good use of their heels and scud away as if the evil one were after them.

The lad runs to the side of his friends, loosens the nooses about their throats, and cutting their cords sets them free.

"Where is the rest of your party, Harry?" asks Hal.

"Ain't got any more, only me, Jerusalem! didn't those fellers git! Wished I'd popped over Tige."

"They may return," said Dan. "Give Hal and me your weapons. Have you any more?"

"Yes, I got your rifle an' his'n in the bushes. I fired 'em off afore I rushed in."

"But you were all alone?" asked Dan in surprise.

"Yes, siree, all alone only me—Gosh! but didn't they get?"

"How did you find where we were?" asked Hal.

"Why, the frauds toted me off last night arter you ran out, an' brought me here. They kep' me hid me away, but I chawed the cords what they tied me with an' got loose. Then I crawled around and found your rifles and pistols, and when they started ter haul ye up, fetched 'em wi' bullets."

"You're a smart lad, Harry, and deserve a great deal of credit. Oh, we'll make a man of you yet."

"Tell ye what, you an' him," pointing to Hal, "has been good to me, and you don't 'spose I was goin' ter let a lot of fellers string ye up, was I? Not much."

"You're a trump, Harry," answered Hal, "and now suppose we go back to the place we came from. Believe us, we shall never forget your courage and good heart."

"I tried to get at ye afore they had the ropes fixed, but I couldn't; I wanted to hit Tige, and I'd 've killed him if I had, but the other fellers I jest peppered, an' I guess they've got away."

This was found to be the case, the men having been only slightly wounded, though they had yelled as if they had been fatally shot.

No trace of them was found, and the three started off in all haste for the miner's house, meeting Martin upon the way.

He informed them that Tige had carried off the miner's daughter Susie, and that the man had gone for help.

Harry's clothes having been recovered, they all set out, a horse being provided for the lad in one which the outlaws had left behind them in their hurry.

"There's a claimant for the lad already," said Martin, when they were again under way. "Tige was not alone in the plot, but was accompanied by a man named Simonson, who induced Dick, the miner, to get you out of the house so that he could carry Harry off."

He then related the story as the miner told it to him that morning, and Dan declared that if he caught the man he should receive a lesson he would not soon forget.

"It was Tige what yanked me out o' bed," said Harry, "for I seed him. The pesky cuss throwed me right over his shoulder like I'd been a pig, without givin' me a chance to put on my clothes nor nothin'. I kicked him in the mouth an' eyes with my bare feet, an' then he put suthin' over my head an' chucked me acrosst his hoss. I'd just like to spot him if it was only for that."

"We'll get a chance yet, my lad," remarked Dan. "Now, my men, to the rescue!"

Late in the afternoon they entered a rocky defile where the big boulders towered above their heads on either side, and the stunted trees on the crags above them cast a shade below, making it seem almost like twilight.

"I don't like the looks of this place," mused Dan, half to himself. "It affords a fine hiding-place for robbers, and one from which they could fire upon us without being dislodged."

"Let us push on," exclaimed Hal, "and if they are here, it will not be long before they show themselves!"

They had ridden but a few paces when there came a rushing sound, small stones and earth began rattling down the bank, and then a rock, weighing many tons, bounded towards them with a rush, striking the ground close to the feet of Dan's horse.

"Aha! they have begun their work!" he cried, and instantly a shower of small stones came whistling through the air, striking all around them.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HALT IN THE MOUNTAINS—THE RECONNOISSANCE.

"THAT makes twice, since I have been in this part of the country," said Hal, "that I had stones thrown at me. I don't propose to submit to the indignity any longer."

Dodging a second shower of missiles, he threw his rifle to his shoulder and fired towards the spot from which they seemed to come.

There was a howl, and he fired again, a second howl attesting the correctness of his aim.

A man's body was seen to fall forward and then tumble from rock to rock, sliding down the bank, accompanied by a mass of earth and gravel, stopping at the bottom, at last, close to where Hal stood.

The man was the unknown outlaw who had been discovered in Dan's room, on the night when Van and his allies had attempted to get rid of the famed vigilante and his friends.

"So we have settled you at last, have we?" said Hal, dodging behind a rock and firing another shot, Dan and Martin firing at the same time. "Well, if your friends want to share the same fate, let them show themselves."

The villains evidently considered the place untenable, for no more rocks came from that quarter, and it was safe to suppose that they had retired to a more secure spot.

"I would like to know how to get up there," said Dan, "without being discovered, for I think likely they won't stay there much longer."

"We must get Susie out of their clutches at all hazards," added Hal, "and then to punish that rascal, Tige Somers."

"Here is a little nook where we can remain unobserved," said young Martin suddenly, pointing to a place he had discovered, and our friends led their horses thither and stood perfectly sheltered from observation, and out of the way of any stones that might be hurled at them.

It was not exactly a cave, but a hollow place in the bank, arched over by the rocks and thick bushes, being plenty large enough to allow of their putting the horses in one corner and stretching out upon the soft mass at the other side.

They at once dismounted and secured their horses, sitting together with their backs against the rocks and talking in low tones.

It was growing dark, and having had nothing to eat since morning, the question of supper was one which naturally forced itself upon their minds.

They had all taken a small supply of food with them when they left Dick's house, and this they now drew from

their coat pockets and proceeded to make a frugal, though hearty, repast.

Martin had a canteen filled with spring water, and Dan had his inseparable brandy flask with him, so they did not suffer from the want of fluid refreshment.

Hal never drank spirits except in case of sickness, but Dan advised him to take a thimbleful to keep out the cold, which began to be felt as the night advanced.

Harry was given just a drop, for the same purpose, although he objected until Dan told him he must.

The poor little fellow was beginning to grow very tired, and in less than five minutes after their outdoor meal was finished he fell fast asleep.

Hal picked him up tenderly, and laying him upon a soft bed of moss, made a pillow for him of his saddle, and covered him up with a horse blanket.

It had grown quite dark when Dan stole cautiously out into the pass and looked up.

He returned in a few moments, and reported that the villains must be above them still, as he could hear a voice occasionally and see the steam of a fire.

"Let us wait until they become quiet, and then creep up there," advised Hal. "There ought to be a way."

This plan was agreed upon, and then Hal and Dan lay down and went to sleep, while Martin remained on guard.

In about three hours, he stole cautiously out, as Dan had done, and looking up, saw the tiny, star-like gleam of the watch-fire, but heard no sound.

Returning to the hollow, he awoke the others and reported the result of his observations.

"We might as well go up there, then," said Hal. "Harry and the animals will be safe enough here until we come back."

"We had better go in three different directions," suggested Dan, "and then in case one of us is discovered, the others can rush in and perhaps accomplish our end."

"That is a good idea," said Martin, "but I don't like to leave the boy here alone; suppose some prowler should come along in our absence and make away with him? I should never forgive myself."

"To tell the truth," remarked Dan, "I don't altogether like to leave him here myself. Would you mind staying behind, Martin?"

"I will if you say so. You don't think I am afraid because I suggested the thing?"

"No, indeed," said both men in a breath.

"Then I will stay behind."

"If you need our help, give a sharp whistle," said Dan, as he went towards the opening; "it may be that we shall need you, and in that case, I will blow my call."

"If we were anywhere near Denver now," remarked Hal, "you would see half a hundred brave fellows start up at that sound, and rush to their leader's side."

"Come Hal," said Dan, quickly, "we must be off, and may good luck attend us!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE RESCUE—THE NIGHT ASSAULT—A MISSING BOY.

ON top of the rocks the mountaineer and his followers were intrenched, deeming their retreat impregnable.

After the assault upon Dan and his friends which had resulted so disastrously to themselves, three of their number having been killed and several badly wounded, they gave up that method of warfare, and contented themselves with repulsing any further attack in case it should be made.

Sentinels were posted all around their little camp, but as these reported that neither Dan nor any of his friends were to be seen, Tige congratulated himself upon having driven them away.

Susie was still a prisoner, and the wretched Tige told her he was going to take her home with him and demand a ransom from her father, failing the payment of which, he would make her his wife.

The poor girl answered him scornfully, and said that he would repent of his conduct, for her father and his friends would follow and punish him for his outrageous conduct.

Tige laughed, and Susie was put into a little shanty constructed on the rocks, and left to her sad thoughts, the outlaws making merry around a fire which they had built soon after dark.

They were all well supplied with liquor, and before long the flasks circulated freely, and songs and ribald jokes were numerous.

One by one they fell into a drowsy slumber, guards and all, the fire, which had been replenished, burning lower and lower, until all that remained was a large bed of glowing coals from which an occasional flame would shoot up as the night wind stirred it.

An hour passed, and then a dark figure crept silently up from the rocks below and looked carefully about on all sides.

At the same moment a second figure appeared at a little distance away and stole along the ground towards the fire, gazing earnestly at the recumbent forms lying all around.

"St! Is that you, Hal?" whispered the first figure, which was Denver Dan himself.

"Yes, do you see anything of the girl?"

"No, let us look about us."

The two came together, and made their way silently through the little camp, which was now as still as the grave itself.

After a little while they both espied the shanty, and made their way toward it without disturbing a leaf or snapping a twig.

Dan pulled aside the craggy door and looked in, but all was darkness and gloom.

"St! are you there, Susie?" asked Dan, in a whisper.

"Who is that?" said a voice.

"Denver Dan; I have come to your rescue."

"Thank Heaven! I knew some one would come for me. Where is my father?"

"I don't know. Are you tied?"

"No."

"Then come out at once, and we will go away from here as fast as we can."

The young girl arose, and, coming to the door, seized Dan's hand and kissed it gratefully.

"There, there, don't do that, you'll make my wife jealous," said Dan, with a quiet laugh. "Come quickly."

"Who is that?" she said, suddenly, as she saw a dark form arise close beside the door as she passed out.

"My friend. Do not be alarmed. I will have to lift you up, but don't be frightened."

Dan thereupon lifted the young girl in his strong arms and bore her swiftly away, followed close by Hal.

When they had nearly reached the circuitous path leading down to their rendezvous below, Hal forgot his usual caution, and put his foot down without first looking to see where he was stepping.

As it happened, he planted his foot, fair and square, upon the big mouth of one of the outlaw sentinels, and the fellow awoke with a howl and a scream and grabbed Hal by the leg.

The young fellow gave the wretch a stunning kick with his other foot, and bounded away like the wind.

The alarm had been given, however, and those of the scoundrels who were the least drunk sprang to their feet and raised a terrible outcry.

Hal fired half a dozen shots at them, turning as he ran, and this aroused more of the brutes, who at once began a general fusilade, firing in the direction where Hal was, but fortunately doing him no serious injury.

In the midst of all the voice of Tige was heard, raised in angry command, calling upon the men not to let the villains escape.

Dan waited until Hal came up, and then fired a volley at the scoundrels, giving three of them all they wanted for six months, and plowing a furrow across the top of Tige's

head, which, while it did not kill him, made him feel decidedly sick.

In a moment Dan had reached the path, and flew down it with the speed of a hare, carrying the young lady in his arms.

It took but a few moments more to reach the hollow in the rocks, and then Dan whistled sharply.

There was no answer.

Dan rushed in and called to Martin to know if everything was all right.

Not a sound broke the stillness, and our hero struck a match and set fire to a bunch of moss, illuminating the place with the brightness almost of day.

Martin was missing, and so was Harry and the two horses.

"The boy is gone!" cried Dan, "and that miscreant has stolen him. No wonder he wanted to stay behind!"

CHAPTER X.

"DENVER DAN TO THE RESCUE."

DAN would not willingly have uttered a suspicion against any one without being first positive of their guilt, and in the present instance his words were hasty and forced from him by the impulse of the moment.

He had become attached to the boy, partly on Hal's account, and partly because the little fellow was quaint and unlike other boys, and had attracted him by his odd ways and real bravery.

When he was missing, therefore, his first thought was that Martin had betrayed his trust, and made away with the boy to suit his own base purposes, particularly as both horses were gone.

"At any rate he has given us our own horses with which to pursue him," he muttered. "Come, Hal, my lad, mount and away, there is no time now for deliberation. I will take the young lady with me on my horse."

Hal made no answer, but springing into the saddle darted down the road, Dan riding close behind.

They were none too soon, for as they left the spot two or three immense stones came tumbling down, tearing up the bushes, and bringing a cloud of dust and shower of small stones with them.

They kept on at a rapid rate, but soon heard the outlaws galloping after them, shouting like so many fiends and firing an occasional shot.

Dan fell behind his party a little, giving Susie over to Hal's care, and entrenching himself behind a tree, waited until the outlaws were within range, when he opened fire upon them with his repeating rifle, picking off at least half a dozen of the foremost.

The outlaws fell back at this, and Dan rejoined Hal and continued upon his way unmolested, reaching the house of Dick about sunrise.

Here they found the honest miner with a party of men, having just returned from an unsuccessful hunt, the villains having utterly eluded them.

Dick was overjoyed at getting his daughter back safe, and was very much chagrined to find that he had been led to believe that Dan was a rogue.

"If I'd known that Tige was in it, I wouldn't have been caught so easy," he said; "for I know him to be the biggest liar in these parts, and a regular ruffian besides. I give him one horsewhippin' not long ago, and I've got another one ready for him whenever I see him. Where's the boy?"

Dan told him that he was missing, and that they feared treachery had been practiced.

"I cannot think that Martin has gone back on us," said Hal, earnestly. "I don't think he is that kind of a fellow. I believe he is really honest in his intentions to live a good life, and something must have happened to him and Harry. Some of the outlaws may have fallen upon them suddenly

and captured them before they knew what they were about."

"Perhaps so," said Dan. "I would not say a word against him without giving him a chance to redeem himself, but as it stands now, the case has a bad look. Surely he could have given us some indication that he was in danger, raised an outcry or fired a shot."

"Wait a while, Dan, don't judge him too harshly; just wait."

"I will, Hal, for your sake."

Dick invited them in to breakfast, and then the question of what was to be done next arose, Dan suggesting the immediate departure in pursuit of the ruffians.

"If Martin has been overpowered, as you say, Hal, it is quite likely that Harry is now with the main body of the cutthroats and consequently our best plan is to follow them up."

They were in the midst of their meal, when a man burst into the room, armed with a shot gun, demanding in excited tones:

"Where is the villain, the man that calls himself Denver Dan."

"I am that person," said Dan, quietly.

The man threw his weapon to his shoulder in an instant.

"Tell me what you have done with the boy you stole, or I'll send a bullet through you!"

"I think not."

"What is to hinder?"

"Look around you and you will see!"

The man glanced around and saw that every person in the room had him covered with a revolver or rifle.

"You are all in the plot," he said excitedly, "but I will sell my life dearly. Tell me where the boy is and let me seek him."

"That is just what we want to know ourselves."

"You shall never have him. He is mine, and I will fight for him to the death. If you don't tell me what I wish to know, I will shoot you, be the consequences what they may."

"Stop, stop," cried Hal, "there is a little misunderstanding here. Is this the man you called Simonson, Dick?"

"Yes," answered the latter.

"That is not his name. Don't you know me, Mr. Everett? Put up your weapon, we are all your friends here. Dan, and gentlemen," he continued, "lower your revolvers, this man is the father of the stolen boy."

The man looked earnestly at Hal a moment, and then said:

"Why, as I live, it is young Barstow, Hal Barstow, that my boy Harry used to be so fond of when he was a little fellow. There must be some mistake here."

"There is a decided mistake, Mr. Everett, and there have been several of them. One was in getting in with that villain, Tige Somers. Another was in taking us for your foes."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Barstow," said the man, taking Hal by the hand, "but my anxiety to recover my boy made me blind to all else. Where is he?"

"That's what we want to know," and Hal gave him an account of everything that happened, stating in conclusion that they were at that moment discussing a plan of action.

"I am happy to have met the real Denver Dan," said Everett, shaking our hero's hand warmly, "and not an imposter as I feared. Do as your like in this matter and I will follow you and trust to your judgment."

"We are about to go in pursuit of the villains," said Dan, "and if you like you can accompany us. Be assured that it will give me infinite pleasure to restore your son to your arms. You will find him rather wild, but that will soon wear off."

"Now boys, let's be off," said Hal rising from his seat, "and let our watchword be:

"Denver Dan to the rescue!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE DECEPTION—HELPLESS AND ALONE.

WHAT had happened to Martin and Harry, and where were they all this time, while Dan was tormented with suspicions that even Hal could not wholly allay?

What had become of them, and why had they disappeared so mysteriously?

Was Martin then a traitor to his newly-made resolutions, and had he spirited the lad away for his own base purposes?

Not so. He was as true as ever, and was even at this moment plotting to escape with the lad from the toils into which they had fallen.

Let us return to the time when he was left alone with the sleeping boy to guard against danger and await Dan's return.

Dan had been gone about ten minutes and all was still silent, when Martin heard a low whistle outside of the little cave.

Thinking that Dan needed his assistance he ran hastily out into the pass and looked around him expecting to see Dan.

The whistle was presently repeated, and, looking up, Martin saw a dark figure descending the rocks.

"Is that you, Dan?" he said.

"Yes. Come here quick," answered a muffled voice.

Suspecting nothing, Martin advanced and the figure leaped from the last rock and came towards him.

"What's the matter?" asked Martin.

"We've got to get out of here pretty quick or we'll get into trouble."

"Where is Hal?"

"Don't you see him? He's behind you."

Martin turned, and at that moment an adhesive plaster was clapped over his mouth which prevented his uttering a sound or even breathing, except through his nose.

He tried to tear it off, but his hands were seized in a powerful grasp and fastened behind his back with a pair of handcuffs.

His captor, for he realized at once that the man was not Denver Dan, then threw him to the ground and secured his ankles together with a strap.

Leaving him where he lay, the man entered the little cave, and, gagging Harry before he awoke, bound him hand and foot, and throwing him over his shoulder went outside again, leading two of the horses.

Strapping Harry to the back of one, he mounted the other himself and rode off, having first taken the unconscious Martin and carried him into the bushes, a few yards distant.

The poor young man heard Dan and Hal when they returned from the attack upon the outlaws, but being unperceived by them, was unable to make known to them his whereabouts.

He heard Dan express his suspicions against him, and blushed with shame to think that he had been taken unawares.

He could hear the shouts and pistol shots, the clatter of horses' hoofs and the defiant words of Dan, but was unable either to move or to make a sound, lying helpless in the bushes, while all these exciting scenes were going on around him.

He did not know who his captor was, nor what designs he had upon Harry, and therefore had he been free at that moment, could not have given Dan any clew.

The whole affair had been so sudden that he was completely stunned and bewildered, having no idea of the man, his designs, or even the direction he had taken when he went off.

The noises gradually ceased, the outlaws riding by in hot haste, and all was once more as silent as when he had heard the mysterious signal.

The outlaws did not return and there he lay, alone and

helpless, all through the night, the morning sun finding him still in his unpleasant predicament.

It was impossible to free his hands or feet, and any effort to remove the plaster from his mouth only caused him acute pain.

He tried to burst it out with his tongue, but it was covered with some bitter substance that made that member smart exceedingly upon coming in contact with it, and he did not repeat the experiment.

He suffered the greatest agonies of mind and body, and the night seemed a very age in extent.

As the sun arose higher and higher, and no one came to release him, he felt that he was doomed and had been abandoned purposely to a dreadful fate.

He would starve to death, for the road itself was an unfrequented one, and he was off the main path, right in the midst of a dense thicket where no one would be likely to come.

If he did not die of starvation, a more speedy, but doubly terrible fate might be his, to be eaten by wolves, which he knew abounded in these parts.

If another night should come and he be still in his helpless condition he knew that those voracious man-eaters would find him out and make an end to him.

The thought was terrible, and he tried to banish it from his mind, but others more horrible forced themselves upon him, and he felt that he should go mad.

An hour or two passed and he heard voices and the tramp of horses.

They came nearer and he could hear Denver Dan and Hal, and Dick the miner, all conversing merrily.

Friends within a stone's throw and he unable to call them or otherwise give notice of his presence.

It was too horrible, and his heart sank within him at the thought.

They would not see him and he would be left to die there, alone and unable to move a muscle, and worse than that, suspected of a baseness which he would rather die than commit.

CHAPTER XII.

MARTIN'S STRANGE PRESERVER AND HER COMRADE.

NEARER and nearer came the party, evidently in search of the outlaws, for Martin could hear them talking of Harry and Tige, and Hank Miles and the rest.

They passed by without seeing him, and then he could hear them ascending the path, their voices growing fainter every moment, until at last he could scarcely hear a sound.

Then there came the patter of some animal's feet upon the dead leaves and dry mass.

A wolf?

No, for the animal runs to and fro, sniffs the air, gives a short bark, and finally runs to where he is lying, and standing still gives one long deep bay.

It is a blood-hound, and has evidently been put upon his track.

The huge animal stands above him, offering no violence, but licks his face and hands, for he has been lying upon his side all this time, and evidently waiting for some one to come up.

He does not recognize the dog, and does not know any one in the vicinity that owns one, but he presumes that it has been sent out to seek him by his friends who have just now passed by.

He hears some one calling to the animal and then distinguishes the sound of their footsteps in the bushes.

The person, whoever it is, comes nearer, the dog whines, and a shadow is cast across his face.

He looks up and sees a girl, a young girl dressed in a short skirted low-necked dress of faded material, originally red, standing above him.

She is dark-skinned and sunburned, her hair of a

bleached brown, falling in a tangled mass upon bare broad shoulders, her feet are encased in moccasins, and in her hands she carries a whip.

"So you've found him, have you, Leo?" she says in a voice by no means musical, yet not particularly coarse.

The animal wags his tail, and the girl drawing a knife from her pocket cuts the cords from Martin's feet, and carefully shaves away the plaster over his mouth.

"He needn't have been so particular about that," she says, "but confound him he hasn't any heart. Handcuffed, too. I can't get them off."

The dog began wagging his tail again, and rubbed his head against the girl's hand.

"What's the matter with ye?" she said impatiently. "Go away and don't bother me."

Martin had by this time managed to get upon his feet, though his limbs pained him excessively from having been in one position so long upon the cold ground.

"Did Dan send you with the dog to find me?" he asked, leaning against a tree.

"Denver Dan? No, he didn't, and I don't want to see him. He drove my father away from Denver, and would have killed him if he'd got a chance."

"Then he must have been an outlaw, for Dan is kind-hearted and good to all honest and unfortunate people."

"So he was an outlaw and made counterfeit money, but he was my father all the same. The rest of 'em got killed, Texas Jim and all, but dad didn't, and he swears to kill Denver Dan at sight."

"Will you take these handcuffs off of my wrists?"

"I can't, 'cause I ain't got the keys. We'll have to go back to the den afore we can do that."

"I will not go there; my friends are here, and I want to join them."

"You'll have to go with me, 'cause dad has got the keys."

"I won't do it."

"You must. Stop your noise," she continued, boxing the dog over the ears, he having been trying to attract her attention to something.

"What is that upon his collar that jingles so?" the young man asked.

His wild companion turned to the dog and exclaimed, joyfully:

"It's the key that unlocks the handcuffs. I forgot that father sometimes puts them on his collar. Why, Leo, boy, did you want to tell me you had it, and didn't I know what you meant?" she said, coaxingly, detaching the key from the dog's collar. "Well, well, that was too bad, wasn't it?"

Then she unlocked the handcuffs and secured them to the dog's collar, after which she turned to Martin, and said:

"Now follow me, and I'll give you a horse, and we'll go and see the little boy. Isn't he a funny fellow? Is he your brother?"

"The boy that was stolen last night?"

"Yes; dad knew he belonged to Denver Dan, and so took him away. I won't let him hurt the boy, 'cause I love him, and I'll love you too, if you come with me; but Dan shan't have you or him either."

"I cannot go with you, my girl, and you must tell us where the boy is hid."

"I won't; and if you dare to leave me, I will set Leo on you, and when I tell him, he will kill anybody."

At this moment Martin heard the party returning, having seen nothing of Tige or any of the outlaws.

He bounded into the bushes, and began shouting at the top of his voice for Dan to help him.

"After him Leo!" shouted the young savage, and with a deep bay, the dog leaped with long strides towards the flying Martin.

"Kill him, Leo, kill him!" screamed the girl, and the dog understood her only too well.

Martin fairly flew along the path, and now Dan sees him,

but the dog is close behind him, and in another second has thrown him down.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE NICK OF TIME—NEWS OF HARRY.

As the huge dog rushed upon Martin and bore him to the earth, he made a savage dart at the latter's throat.

One snap of those terrible jaws, and Martin's chances of life would not have been worth speaking about.

Utterly helpless in the power of such a brute, unable to defend himself or escape from his peril, his situation was indeed a fearful one.

Death stares him in the face, and if help comes it must arrive within the instant, or it will be too late.

It does come within the instant, and by a hair's breadth only is the young man saved.

Denver Dan had seen his peril and rushed to the rescue.

His trusty repeating rifle is thrown up as the dog makes the first bound.

Before he can fasten his cruel fangs upon Martin's throat, the swift-winged messenger of death speeds through the air with a whiz, and is buried in his brain.

Whiz!

Zip?

Thud!

One howl sounds upon the air, the blood spurts from his mouth, and with a convulsive gasp, he falls lifeless upon the body of the young man.

The singular creature who has called the brute her pet, throws herself upon him, and clasps his great head in her arms.

She presses her tangled locks against those terrible jaws, and kisses his forehead.

The hot tears flow down her bronzed cheeks, and the great sobs well up from her bosom, as though they would tear her heart in twain.

"Poor Leo, good dog," she moans, "they have killed you, they have taken you away from me, and I loved you so much."

Dan now came up and attempted to raise the young girl from the ground, but she repelled him fiercely.

"Go away, you wicked men," she screamed, "you have killed my dog, and I will tell Wolf, and he will kill you."

"Won't you let this young man get up, you are killing him, you and your dead dog?"

The singular creature sprang to her feet, and Martin released himself from his awkward position.

"You have killed my dog, and I will tell Wolf to kill the child," she screamed.

"Who is this creature?" asked Dan of one of the miners.

"She's a sort of half-crazy child that lives with an old sinner they call Wolf. He has taken the boy we are looking after, most likely, to his den."

"Where is it?"

"In the mountains. He and the dog and the girl live all alone, and no one has ever dared go there on account of the dog."

"What is this man?"

"A hermit, half mad, I guess, and half devil, for he has been said to steal children before and kill them. The Lord only knows why he never killed this one."

Martin now told his story, and Dan proposed setting out at once to the rescue of Harry.

The young girl had darted off into the woods, and by this time had disappeared, but by putting spurs to their horses and making all speed they yet hoped to overtake her before it was too late.

One of the miners knew the way and he rode in advance, the others following on close behind, not a man uttering a sound, but every one excited to the highest pitch.

The Wolf was a man of most savage nature, and no one

knew his real name, he having thrown aside all ties that bound him to mankind.

Dan at first thought that he must be his old enemy, Larry, but a description of the man at once convinced him that such was not the case.

The creature was supposed to be insane, and was a dangerous companion to meet in the woods, having murdered many lonely wanderers who had gone astray in the path.

Children and young boys seemed to be his especial aversion, and he would steal abroad at night and carry them off wherever he might find them.

He had discovered Martin and Dan, and hating the vigilante on account of his good heart had determined to steal the boy, leave Martin to starve in the bush, and so wreak his vengeance upon Dan.

The real truth of the matter was that he was an escaped outlaw, who had become partially insane, but the name of Denver Dan aroused all his former memories and wrought him to a pitch of absolute frenzy.

The band of rescuers rode on at a furious pace, and before half an hour had passed saw the girl disappearing behind a huge tree.

"That's the cave, behind that 'ere tree!" shouted one of the men. "Come in quick."

He leaped from his horse, followed by the rest, and, pistol in hand, they dashed forward.

The entrance to the abode of the outlaw was plain enough, and, with wild cries, they bounded forward, Dan, Hal and Martin being in advance.

Dan rushed in, and upon the instant a terrible sight met his gaze.

"To the rescue!" he shouted, and then discharged his weapon.

CHAPTER XIV.

SAVED FROM DEATH—HOME AGAIN—CONCLUSION.

IN the one low-ceiled room of the outlaw's den, against the wall, tied hand and foot to a stout beam, stripped to the skin and gagged was Henry Everett.

Before him stood the demon who inhabited this loathsome den, dressed in rags and covered with filth, holding a knife to the poor boy's heart.

In another instant he would have plunged it deep into the lad's breast, and Dan would have been too late.

The wild, gipsy-like girl had already given the warning, and the madman had at that instant seized the knife.

Once more did our hero come to the rescue at the critical moment, and by his coolness save a life and punish crime.

The rifle belched forth fire and smoke, the swift bullet flew to its mark, and, with a cry like the baffled shriek of a fiend, the human monster fell dead at the feet of his intended victim.

Hal bounded forward, and releasing Harry from the cruel

bonds that cut into his tender flesh, pressed him to his heart with all the tenderness of a mother.

The poor lad was weak and faint, and for some minutes could not speak, but at last he was able to feebly express his thanks for his timely deliverance.

"That old feller ran away with me last night, an' was agoin' to stick me," he said at length, "'cause I wouldn't promise to get Denver Dan inter his clutches."

"He has paid the penalty of his crimes now," remarked Hal, "and will no more trouble us or any one else."

"He wanted me to go with the gal and tell lies to Dan about Martin so he'd come here, and then Dan was to be killed, but I told him I'd see him in——"

"Never mind where, Harry," interrupted Hal, with a laugh. "He has gone there without your help."

"The gal got mad," resumed the boy, "and said she'd find the young feller and make him betray Dan, anyhow, and then she went off with the dog. He's an ugly brute, he is, and I was afraid of him, I wouldn't have been afraid of a common dog, but that yer one was like a regular old Nick."

"He won't hurt you any more, Harry, for Dan shot him."

"I'm just glad of it. Where's the gal went to all of a sudden. She was here first?"

The girl had disappeared, but our friends cared little for that, and putting Harry upon a horse they left the spot.

The meeting between Harry and his father was most touching, the flood-gates of the lad's memory having been opened, and the recognition being complete.

Together they set out once more upon the homeward journey, Dan, Hal and Martin accompanying them.

Of the strange girl nothing was seen, but Dan learned afterwards that she had joined a party of outlaws and had vowed to kill him.

This caused our hero no uneasiness, however, as he had been threatened so many times before that he did not mind it.

Denver was reached in safety, and the gallant leader of the Mystic Band was most heartily welcomed by his old friends.

Martin kept his promise of living an honest life, and was enrolled among the members of Dan's band, doing most effective service therein.

Harry Everett in time made a very respectable lad, having got over his wild ways and taken kindly to civilized habits.

He and his father returned to the east in a few months, and Harry went to school, where his native quick-wittedness gave him a decided advantage, his progress being remarkably rapid.

As for Dan and his friends there were many exciting adventures ahead for them, which we may have occasion to describe in the future, but for the present, having reached our limit, we must pause and say, not farewell, but *au revoir*.

[THE END.]

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